Malkin E-5 (1953-1956)1962 MU31 Seri MU31

MOLLUSCA

VII

USES

Species	Food		Decoration		Trade		Bait
	Pres.	Past	Pres.	Past	Pres.	Past	
Octopus bimaculatus	x	x				x	x
Codakia distinguenda		x					
Laevicardium elatum		x			x[1]		
Carditamera affinis	x	x					
Aemaea dalliana			x	x	x		
Crucibulum spinosum		x	x	x	x		
Chione undatella	x	x					
Chione californiensis	x	x					
Pteria peruviana	x	?	x	?	x		
Volsella capax	x	x					
Olivella dama			x	x	x		
Cyprea annettae				x[2]			
Tegula rugosa		x		x		x	
Conus regularis		x[3]		x	x	?	
Phyllonotus erythrostomus		x				x	
Turritella brodeiſiana		x[3]			x	?	
Polinices reclusiana	x	x					
Chlamys subdudosa	x	?					
Atrina maura	x	?			x[4]		
Navicula pacifica		x					
Turbo fluctuosa	x	?			x		
Solenostira pallida			x	?	x		
Ceritium stercusmuscorum			x				
Trivia radiana			x				
Ficus ventricosus	x						
Nioche bistrianoca	x	x					

[1]Occasionally used as dip spoon
[2]Supposedly used in the past for money
[3]In the past "giants of 300-400 maybe years ago have eaten it."
[4]Only pearls

These figures show then 26 out of 37 species exploited economically in some way, that is 70%. These figures show increase over the figures I have published previously (1956) which were 21 out of 36 species and 58% respectively. The corrected figures are the result of brief additional field work in 1955.

Food

A good part of the molluscan forms are used as food. Altogether 19 species are listed as such, although out of these, only 11 were reported as being part of the diet today while the remainder only in the past. It is obvious that there has been progressive decrease in the Seris' dependence on the molluscan diet within the past few generations.

Four of the species reported as part of the Seri diet at various times had been collected from the kitchen-middens. There are: *Pteria peruviana*, *Chlamys subdudosa*, *Volsella capax*, and *Navicula pacifica*. Of these four, *Navicula* has been reported as eaten in the past "maybe 100 years ago, but not

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301 worn. I have observed women wearing necklaces
+825 of the former and women and very young boys of the latter. The olive shell, incidentally, is made into two sorts, the natural, unroasted shells which retain a greenish-purple, mottled color and the white. The white pallid color is achieved by roasting the shells over fire. The necklaces are mostly made up of either colored or white but occasionally they may be made of mixed shells and then they are usually alternately interlaced, now with one, now with another.

+825 b) *Utensils:* Two species had been reported used as occasional drinking or dipping cups and spoons. *Lavicardium elatum* and *Ficus ventricosus*. *Ficus* is presently discarded, but the *Lavicardium* is still occasionally used so. There is no doubt that the incidental use of these shells increases during longer fishing expeditions when the Seris are apt to lose some of their gear.

[412] [415]

[436] c) *Money:* Interestingly, the brown cowry was supposed to have been used as a means of exchange, as money—in the past. If this is so, then the selection of this shell for such purpose is not surprising considering its widespread use throughout the world.

[171]

439 d) *Trade:* Altogether 12 species had been re-
+825 ported as traded off either in the past or present. The trade importance of various species of shells varies with the demand of the market and sometimes may be only sporadic and short-lived. Only a few of the species had been indicated as having been of any trade importance in the past, and it may well be that the Seris did not register the species which may have been briefly sold to and outsiders during the short-lived fads of demand. It may be said in general that the trade importance of the shells increases and that greater variety of them are exploited now than formerly. This is surely owing to the increasing accessibility of the Seri country and the increasing tourism, not only visitors from Hermosillo, but also from such far flung places as Tucson, Phoenix and even Los Angeles.

[177]

In some instances, the Seris had no idea what the shells were sold for. The augur shell is on and off sold to some American traders who show up in Desemboque once in a while and for whom the Seri women accumulate these shells. But what uses were made of these, the Indians surely didn't know. Neither did they know what uses were made of the *Murex* shell and the *Turbo*, both of which were periodically sold in bulk to Hermosillo. On the other hand, they had some idea what uses were made of some other shells. *Pteria* and *Atrina* contain pearls and these are much desired. Especially the pearls of *Atrina* which are sold to the Mexicans or to the visitors for 25-50 pesos each and therefore have immense value, for the local market. The *Pteria* shells are said to be used for button making, and the Seris themselves claim that they make buttons of this shell. The most important of all, however, at least at the time of my visits in 1953 and 1955, was the olive shell. It was easily the most commonly and most numerously collected shell of all that the Seris ever collected. Owing to the scarcity of it in Desembo-

[435] [237] [226]

261 will exist on very small rations, bear burdens, and walk long dis-
262 tances. Their food is anything that walks, flies, crawls or swims,
[252] and they eat it raw with the same relish that we eat it cooked. There is but one thing they will not eat; they draw the line on the Gila monster. They are the most perfect type of human being adapted to desert conditions that exists today. Convey them blindfolded many miles into the heart of the desert, empty-handed, remove their blinders, and they will find both food and water where others would perish. The Papagos and Yaquis do almost as well."

302 We gave the women a small bag of flour and three or four cubes of
[123] sugar around, and the men three packets of tobacco each and two boxes of matches. Matches with them are very precious and are rarely used. Rather than use a match a woman came over to our fire and borrowed some coals to rebuild her fire. From this point the nearest matches are a good deal over one hundred and twenty miles distant, so they have to economize in every thing.

422 Each rag is valuable, and flour, sugar, coffee and rifle shells
• [434] are absolutely priceless. While they know money, it has no value here.
[437] Only commodities go here. The most highly prized things are boards to
[389] make boats and rifle shells to get game and protect themselves. All empty shells are saved, the primer punched out, straightened, a match head put in, a little pinch of powder on top, the shell filled up, a long bullet inserted, the shell pinched tight, and a fresh set of ammunition is made.

142 The women and children certainly did look wild. Their hair was
291 frowsy and unkempt, their skirts and waists a patchwork of dirty rags
302 coming just below the knees; their features seamed and hard and cruel. Their complexion was very dark. They had no under garments. The children wore only a dirty shirt coming a little below their thighs, and even that is ragged. One or two of the women had a dirty bandanna over their heads. How I wished I could have seen them in their ancient, picturesque pelican-skin kilts!

302 I happened to witness the operation of a Seri beauty parlor. A
[029] mother brushed the hair of her thirteen-year-old daughter with a brush
[293] made from the fibrous roots of a certain grass tied together with
[515] sinew. During the operation if she came across a *piojo*, and she found several, she plucked him away from his feeding ground and dropped him in the fire.

The hair neatly brushed, the mother then mixed paint in a small vessel and with a tiny stick painted a bright blue design under the eyes and across the cheeks and nose, and then she added narrow white stripes, which, contrasting with the blue and the dark skin, produced a very striking effect. This paint is easily removed and the women often paint and remove three different face designs in one day.

304 I did not see tattoo work on either men or women, nor did they
301 wear ceremonial feathers as did our western Indians.